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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002571

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: EGYPTIANS ON GAZA

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey per 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (S) Summary: During General Petraeus, December 27-28 visit, Egyptian leaders expressed deep concern with the escalating violence in Gaza, particularly as it exposed Egypt to torrents of both domestic and regional criticism for its alleged complicity in Israeli actions. Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit and EGIS Director Omar Soliman both described Egyptian efforts to contain the situation. Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit has been in continuous contact with his Arab League counterparts to try to guide the December 31 ministerial toward a reasonably constructive outcome based on a return to the status quo of the "tahdiya" ("calming"). General Soliman requested U.S. assistance in persuading Israel to temporarily halt military operations in order to give the Egyptians and others time to pressure HAMAS to observe a cease-fire and re-engage on Palestinian reconciliation. Minister of Defense Field Marshal Tantawi feared a repeat of the January 2008 border breach along the Gaza border, which resulted in thousands of Palestinians streaming into northern Sinai. (Note: On December 28, an estimated 200 Palestinians breached the Gaza border and entered the town of Al-Arish, before being forced back into Gaza by Egyptian security forces. Two Egyptian security officials and several Palestinians were killed during the process). End Summary.

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FM: Arab League Efforts  
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12. (C) In a December 28 meeting with General Petraeus and Ambassador, FM Aboul Gheit expressed deep concern with the situation in Gaza. He noted that the Egyptians were prepared to accept wounded Palestinians at the Rafah border crossing, but HAMAS had so far refused to allow the injured to exit Gaza. During the meeting, Aboul Gheit received telephone calls from UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayid and Libyan Foreign Minister Abdul Rahman Shalgam on an Arab League response. During both calls Aboul Gheit urged support for Egyptian efforts to secure a "package" deal that would return the situation to the period of the tahdiya and would call for regular openings of the border crossings to alleviate Gazan sufferings. He indicated that he had spoken to "everyone," other than the Syrians. He insisted that convening a summit was "premature," stressing that the Foreign Ministers should meet first on December 31 at the Arab League headquarters in Cairo to discuss a response. As he noted later to General Petraeus and the Ambassador, no good could emerge from a summit. He wanted to avoid placing Arab leaders in a position where they would be pressured to issue demands and positions that could not be met and that might lead to calls for AL member states to sever ties to Israel or other non-constructive outcomes. He was particularly determined that if/if a summit was unavoidable, it would take place in Cairo, not Doha as some

were suggesting.

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EGIS: What do the Israelis Want?  
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¶3. (S) During a December 28 meeting, EGIS General Soliman said he had spoken with Israeli Defense Minister Barak and understood that Israel intended to complete it's mission, which he thought might take one - two weeks. He observed that he was not completely certain of what Israel's objective were. Although he had not yet probed the idea with Israel, he believed that the situation would benefit from even a very short cease-fire of 1-2 days to allow Gazans to bury their dead, care for their wounded, and receive humanitarian supplies. Such a break would also provide an opening that would allow both sides to assess the impact of the current situation; HAMAS might be more willing to consider a resumption of the tahdiya. He asked for U.S. support in brokering even the temporary truce that would allow Egypt the opportunity to see what might be accomplished. Soliman noted that Egypt is under enormous domestic and regional public pressure, adding that some press reports erroneously accused Egypt of "harming Palestinians" by keeping the Rafah border closed, when in fact HAMAS is the one preventing wounded Palestinians from exiting Gaza. A break in military operations, Soliman said, would give Egypt the necessary political cover to apply more pressure to HAMAS and expose them as the ones responsible for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

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¶4. (S) Soliman said Egypt is already pressuring HAMAS to renew the tahdiya with Israel. In addition, he said he reached out to the Syrians and urged them to use their influence to convince HAMAS that violence is not the answer. In support of those efforts, "Israel must tell us what their objectives are" Soliman stressed, so that Egypt could work with HAMAS on meeting a defined set of conditions.

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MOD: Concern Over Another Border Breach  
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¶5. (C) On December 27, Field Marshal Tantawi also expressed concern for the conflict in Gaza, fearing a repeat of the January 2008 Gaza-Egypt border breach that sent thousands of Palestinians streaming into northern Sinai. Tantawi said that Egypt "was doing its best" to combat weapons smuggling into Gaza, noting that the installation of U.S. provided counter tunneling equipment was moving forward.

¶6. (C) Comment: The GOE is deeply concerned with the conflict in Gaza and is mobilizing all available diplomatic, military, and intelligence tools to find a solution. Egypt finds itself in the exact place it has worked so hard to avoid - becoming the secondary target of Arab outrage for its unwillingness to have Egypt accede to HAMAS' demands that Egypt unilaterally open its border to allow Gazans and HAMAS freedom to travel and move goods into and out of Gaza. So far, their only plan is to try to put back in place the "calming" that lasted for about six months.  
SCOBAY